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October 22, 2007

TO: Each Supervisor

FROM: Jonathan E. Fielding, M.D., M.P.H.
Director and Health Officer

SUBJECT: **UPDATE ON MEDICAL MARIJUANA ID CARD PROGRAM**

On May 23, 2006 the Board of Supervisors adopted an ordinance amending the Los Angeles County Code, Title 11 to allow the County health officer to accept applications for Medical Marijuana Program identification cards and charge an application fee to cover County costs in administering the State's program. The ordinance became effective on June 22, 2006. On May 29, 2007, the Board approved an ordinance to amend the County Code to implement a new State application fee and change the Code so that subsequent State fee changes may be automatically implemented. This is an update on the implementation of the California Medical Marijuana Identification Card Program (MMIP) in Los Angeles County. MMIP is a State-mandated program.

Implementation in Los Angeles County

On June 1, 2007 the Los Angeles County MMIP began scheduling appointments, which were available beginning July 2, 2007, to eligible patients and caregivers wishing to apply for a medical marijuana identification card. To facilitate appointment scheduling, a toll-free number was established for individuals calling from within Los Angeles County. MMIP application appointments take place in the first floor lobby of the Central Health Center located at 241 N. Figueroa Street. The application fee for medical marijuana ID cards is \$153 (\$66 State fee and \$87 County fee). For Medi-Cal recipients the fee is \$76.50 (\$33 State fee and \$43.50 County fee).

Program implementation was timely and no significant problems were encountered. Within the first week, the MMIP scheduled 101 appointments. After the initial weeks, staff was able to increase the number of appointments available each week. The table below shows the MMIP workload since opening:

Time Period	Total number of applications processed	Number of cards issued
7/1/07 - 7/31/07	58	32
8/1/07 - 8/31/07	72	77
9/1/07 - 9/30/07	28	31
TOTAL	158	140

After the first two months, the program has seen a significant drop in new appointments. As of October 15, fifteen applications have been processed this month. Although only two more appointments are currently scheduled for October, the MMIP has seen a significant increase in walk-in applicants in recent weeks. To investigate the decrease in appointments, the MMIP staff have been informally surveying interested patients and caregivers about this matter as they receive calls for appointments. One of the largest barriers noted by staff is the issue of whether law enforcement will honor the validity of the cards, especially in light of recent federal raids on a number of medical marijuana dispensaries. Other concerns that have been expressed include the cost of the card and the increasing cost of office visits with physicians to obtain a recommendation for use of medical marijuana.

Because the MMIP no longer has a backlog of appointments, it is able to take walk-in customers as well as appointments through the toll-free number: 1-866-621-2204.

Evaluation of Budget and Staffing Needs

When we recommended the County fee for MMIP cards to the Board, we calculated the fee by dividing the projected costs by the estimated number of applicants in the County. At the current pace of appointments, the actual number of applicants will be significantly under the 3000 estimated annual applicants. Assuming that we would process 250 applications per month, we designed the program based on a staff of three. At this time, only two positions are filled. We will keep the third position vacant unless we see a significant upturn in the number of applicants.

Per our commitment when the Board approved the fee, the Department of Public Health will return in January 2008 with a recommendation for any needed staffing changes and fee adjustments after reviewing program performance for the first six months. Even with the salary savings resulting from the vacant position on the MMIP program staff, current applicant volume is not sufficient to cover the costs of operating the program. Therefore, if applications do not increase, we will have to recommend converting the program to a part-time operation and utilizing staff for other functions, or significantly increasing the application fee.

Program Responsibilities

Because of the high visibility of issues associated with medical marijuana dispensaries in various cities, it is important to emphasize that this ID card program does not include any regulation or oversight of the dispensaries at which the ID cards may be used.

I will provide the Board with the next update in January 2008. In the meantime, if you have any questions or need additional information, please let me know.

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PH:506:004

c: Chief Executive Officer
County Counsel
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors